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ABSTRACT

The support of teaching in the liberal arts is examined using data from a random sample of chief liberal arts academic officers of American colleges and universities. Information is presented on 15 categories of faculty support for teaching and research, basic teaching conditions, tenure decisions, and merit salary increases. Differences in support among institutions that vary in size, location, sponsorship, and degree level are identified. The liberal arts are defined as the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. Of 738 questionnaires, 371 usable responses were received. Characteristics of the responding colleges include: 17% offer doctorates, 44% offer master's and bachelor's degrees, 39% are undergraduate colleges, 25% are church-related, 41% are private, and 34% are public. More than half of the respondents rated the availability of funds as good or excellent for just 6 of the 15 categories of support: library books, graduate courses, library journals, computer purchases, and sabbaticals for knowledge acquisition and research. These findings indicate that liberal arts teaching is in less than excellent health on most campuses. In addition, numerous inconsistencies were found among resources, standards, and rewards in institutions of higher learning. (Author/SW)

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RESOURCES AND REWARDS: THE CONDITIONS OF TEACHING THE LIBERAL ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

Using data from a random sample of chief liberal arts academic officers in American colleges and universities, the authors examine the support of teaching in the liberal arts (defined as the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities). Information is presented on 15 catagories of faculty support for teaching and research, basic teaching conditions, tenure decisions, and merit salary increases. Differences in support are examined among institutions that vary in size, location, sponsorship, and degree level. These findings indicate that liberal arts teaching is in less than excellent health on most campuses. In addition, the researchers note numerous inconsistencies among resources, standards, and rewards in institutions of higher learning and urge liberal arts administrators to reduce these inconsistencies where possible.

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RESOURCES AND REWARDS: THE CONDITIONS OF TEACHING THE LIBERAL ARTS IN THE UNITED STATES

Recent commissions on the state of undergraduate education appear to agree that there is much room for improvement in the teaching of the liberal arts in American colleges and universities, although they differ in their identification of the causes of the problem and its remedies. In William Bennett's To Reclaim A Legacy (1984), the cause seems to lie in the faculty itself. We learn there that too many faculty are "...narrow specialists whose teaching is often lifeless, stilted, and pedestrian" (p. 17). The National Institute of Education (1984) and Association of American Colleges (1985) show a greater sensitivity to the part played by administrators in supporting the teaching function. The nineteenth recommendation of NIE's report, Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education asks that administrators place a greater emphasis on teaching quality in hiring, tenure, promotion, and compensation than has been true in the past. Integrity in the College Curriculum, a report from AAC's Project of Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees, makes the point more emphatically.

> Unless the reward system in higher education measures teaching performance as well as research, all efforts to improve college teaching will be to no avail. Good teaching must contribute to the achievement of tenure, promotion, and salary advancement. (p. 37).

None of the three commissions gave adequate attention to the enhancement of teaching quality by providing adequate resources for faculty development and for the direct support of the teaching function through library, computer, secretarial, and other types of teaching support services. A scan of the

higher education literature also failed to reveal much interest in either the rewarding of teaching or its support by administrators. There is considerable talk about improving college teaching without a great deal of attention to the mechanisms whereby this might be achieved in practice. Pockets of literature have developed on topics such as faculty job satisfaction (see, for example, Boberg and Blackburn, 1983; Cares and Blackburn, 1978; and Willie and Stecklein, 1982) and the relationship between teaching and research (see, for example, Showalter, 1978; Michalak and Friedrich, 1981; Crimmel, 1984; and Rossman, 1976) but there is no similar concentration on the administrative support of teaching.

Two examples of a more administrative orientation to the enhancement of quality teaching are the series of surveys of community colleges liberal arts instructors by the Center for the Study of Community Colleges and the surveys of four-year colleges and universities begun by the American Sociological Association with grant support from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education and the Lilly Endowment and continued by the Institute for Advanced Research at Indiana University of Pennsylvania. The Center for Community Colleges carried out its national surveys in 1975, 1977, 1978 and 1983. These surveys show that administrators at America's community colleges have not significantly decreased their support of teaching between 1975 and 1983. The proportion of part-time instructors on the faculty has remained steady, as has the proportion of the faculty that have attended at least one conference or symposium related to teaching. There is some evidence that professional development funding is up while other forms of teaching support are steady or (in the case of clerical help and library/bibliographical assistance) slightly declining.

The ASA surveys of 1977 (Bowker, 1978, 1980, 1981, 1984) were carried out under the leadership of Hans Mauksch. Although they focused on sociology faculty and sociology department chairs, there was also a survey of the deans of academic units in which sociology was taught -- in essence, liberal arts deans in most institutions. It was this survey that became the model for the IUP series of surveys of higher education administrators, beginning with graduate deans (Bowker and Lynch, 1984; Lynch and Bowker, 1984) and progressing to continuing and adult education deans (Lynch, Kolb and Bowker, 1985). The survey reported in this paper is the fourth in the series begun in 1977 by the ASA. These studies share the perspective that the quality of teaching in higher education can be significantly influenced by the proper administration of resources and rewards. They permit the comparison of a wide variety of teaching support mechanisms (including promotion, tenure, merit salary awards, teaching workload, use of part-time instructors, and the availability of institutional funds for 15 categories of teaching support and reward. Among the findings of these studies are the following points.

1. Teaching is the primary factor in all personnel and resource allocation decisions according to deans.
2. However, there is less support for teaching in practice than in these policy positions.
3. Teaching support in practice shows wide variation among institutions.
4. Reasons for this include "...inadequate total budgets in teaching-oriented institutions, the imperfect institutionalization of teaching support structures, and the failure of colleges and universities to sustain a tradition in which teaching is defined as an activity that must be actively encouraged and nurtured in many ways if it is to flourish." (Bowker and Lynch, 1984:47)

METHODS

This study is unusual in the definition of its sampling frame as chief liberal arts academic officers in the United States and in its subject matter as the professional behavior of the liberal arts administrators and their reports about the condition of the liberal arts in their institutions. Names of chief liberal arts academic officers were obtained from address labels of arts and sciences deans and chief college and university academic affairs officers provided by Peterson's Distribution Services, a program of Peterson's Guides. The labels were organized into a single list of chief liberal arts academic officers by choosing the most appropriate position in each institution according to job title and, when necessary, administrative structure. Institutions in which the liberal arts were minimally present were excluded from the sampling frame, as were colleges that did not offer baccalaureate degrees.

A total of 1,476 chief liberal arts academic officers constituted the final sampling frame, out of which questionnaires were sent to a 50 percent random sample in spring 1984. By the cutoff date for inclusion in the study, 371 of the 738 chief liberal arts academic officers had returned usable questionnaires, for a return rate of slightly over 50 percent. Readers should interpret our findings with care given the limits on generalization that are implied by a response rate of 50 percent.

Data processing was carried out using standard methods of data entry and data verification. Data analysis was accomplished using SPSS (SPSS Inc., 1983). The bivariate correlations reported in the study are tau b, a correlational measure for ordinal data, becuase many of the variables are ordinal in nature. The comparison of correlations among ordinal and interval

or ratio-level variables is facilitated when all correlations are computed using the same formula. All relationships mentioned in the results section of the paper are statistically significant at the .05 level or better.

Composition of the Sample

Sixty-three (17 percent) of the sampled institutions offer doctorates, 163 (44 percent) offer master's and bachelor's degrees, and 145 (39 percent) are undergraduate institutions. Twenty-five percent of the institutions are church-related, 41 percent are independent private institutions, and 34 percent are public colleges and universities. The rural-urban geographical distribution of the institutions is fairly balanced, with 15 percent located in rural environments, 30 percent in small towns, 31 percent in urban environments, and 25 percent in metropolitan areas (the percentages sum 101 due to standard rounding procedures).

A number of the institutional characteristics included in the study are measures of the size of the organization. Sixty-six percent of the institutions employ fewer than 150 full-time equivalent faculty members, 21 percent employ 150-499 FTE faculty, 8 percent employ 500-1,000 FTE faculty, and 4 percent employ more than 1,000 FTE faculty. More than a quarter enroll 1,000 or fewer students and over a third have between 1,001 and 2,500 students. Large institutions are much fewer in number, 29 having 10,001 to 20,000 students and 17 enrolling in excess of 20,000 students. There are no graduate students at 40 percent of the institutions sampled.

RESULTS

How well are liberal arts faculty supported in their teaching and research? Table 1 lists 15 activities and expenditures that are crucial in the production of excellence in liberal arts teaching and research. More than

half the chief liberal arts academic officers rated the availability of funds as good or excellent for just six of the 15 categories of support. Library books (67 percent good or excellent funding), graduate courses (65 percent), library journals (62 percent), computer purchases (60 percent), and sabbaticals for both knowledge acquisition (59 percent) and research (56 percent) were more likely than the other support categories to be adequately funded in liberal arts units. The support categories least likely to receive good or excellent funding were research graduate assistants (20 percent), travel to develop grants (24 percent), full professors' salaries (26 percent), grant development personnel (28 percent), research by senior professors (28 percent), research by untenured professors (29 percent), and the purchase of research equipment (30 percent).

It is commonly said that teaching is underfunded in comparison with research at many American colleges and universities. Table 1 is not an objective assessment of the budget figures for teaching and research support (nor could a comparison of apples with oranges such as this one be definitive even if budget details were available). However, it seems reasonable to assume that the chief liberal arts academic officers' funding adequacy ratings substantially reflect the true availability of teaching and research support services in their institutions. Given this assumption, our findings lead us to conclude that teaching support is far more adequate than support for research and scholarship in most colleges and universities.

Correlations between the 15 categories of support and six institutional characteristics (highest degree offered, private/public, rural/urban, faculty size, total student headcount, and graduate student headcount) show that some resources, such as funds for the purchase of library books and travel to conferences, are equally likely to be adequately supported in all types of

institutions. Other resources, most notably full professors' salaries and support for research by both untenured and senior professors, are considerably more likely to be well funded in some types of institutions than in others. This is not to say that these relationships observed in the total sample apply to individual institutions. There may be no variation in the availability of a given resource by types of institutions and yet there may be significant differences among institutions within a specific category of institutions. For example, universities might not differ from four-year colleges in the adequacy of library holdings for institutional needs, yet there might be huge differences between one university and another, and between one four-year college and another. The resources that vary most by institutional type are those that are associated with research and grants. These resources are all more likely to be adequately provided to faculty in large, graduate institutions than to their colleagues in small, undergraduate institutions. There is also a slight tendency for institutions that provide good or excellent funding for research and grants to be under public sponsorship and located in urban areas.

The intercorrelation matrix found in Table 2 does not contain a single statistically significant negative correlation. Nearly all the positive correlations are statistically significant, most of them at the .001 level. They range as high as .86. Institutions that have funds to support excellence in research also are likely to allocate substantial funding for teaching support.

Liberal Arts Teaching

The major emphasis in the professional activity of liberal arts faculty is, without question, classroom teaching. Nearly three-quarters of the

colleges and universities studied require liberal arts faculty to teach 11 or more contact hours per week, and only 7 percent require seven or fewer contact hours per week. In terms of courseload requirements, there are only 25 institutions in the sample that routinely provide liberal arts faculty with substantial released time for scholarly productivity. All but one of the sample institutions in which liberal arts faculty teach seven hours per week or less expect the faculty to give more than half of their professional time to activities other than teaching. In contrast, liberal arts faculty devoted at least three-quarters of their professional time to the teaching enterprise in more than two-thirds of the institutions studied.

The efforts of the faculty are supplemented by part-time instructors in nearly all colleges and universities. These instructors typically have no higher education responsibilities other than teaching one or two courses per semester. It is of considerable concern that one in every six colleges and universities relies on part-time instructors to teach at least a quarter of all liberal arts courses. Even worse, 26 of the institutions in the sample teach 40 percent or more of their liberal arts courses with part-time instructors. One wonders whether students are able to find enough professors on the campuses of these institutions to meet their advising and other extracurricular educational needs.

Teaching load and the proportion of faculty time devoted to teaching are lowest in large, private, urban, graduate institutions, while teaching by part-time instructors is rather evenly distributed across institutional categories. The major influence on the use of part-time instructors is urbanization. Colleges and universities in small towns and rural areas presumably use few part-time instructors because they cannot locate qualified

individuals in their local communities. This puts them at a decided economic disadvantage at the same time that it benefits their students.

Tenure Decisions

Six factors which might reasonably be considered in tenure decisions about liberal arts faculty are teaching, research, publications, committee assignments and other services to the organization, involvement with external professional organizations, and service to the external community. The weighting of these six factors in tenure decisions is summarized in Table 3. Percentages in the table have been calculated across the rows for each tenure factor rather than down the columns for each tenure weight. The mean weight (ranked with 1.0 as most important) for teaching is 1.1, with an overwhelming 92 percent of the chief liberal arts academic officers citing it as the most important factor in tenure decisions. Although committee work is less likely than research or publications to be the most important tenure factor, it is more likely than the other tenure factors to be weighted as the second most important factor in tenure decisions. The mean weights for the tenure factors which are less important than teaching are: institutional service (2.9), research (3.1), publication (3.4), professional organization involvement (4.3) and community service (4.4).

Teaching and institutional service are likely to have great importance in small, rural, private, undergraduate institutions, while research and publications are most highly favored in large, urban, public, graduate institutions. Tenure weights for involvement in professional organizations and community service are unrelated to these institutional characteristics, except for a slight tendency for community service to be more highly weighted in small than in large institutions.

If a college or university emphasizes research in tenure decisions, one would expect to find a high level of internal funding for research by untenured professors. In the chief liberal arts academic officers study a correlation of .33 was found between the two variables. Unfortunately for many untenured professors, the availability of funds for their research was poor in approximately a quarter of the institutions in which research was the first, second, or third most important factor in tenure decisions.

Merit Salary Increases

Most institutions utilize merit salary increases to recognize and reward outstanding job performance by professors. The questionnaire on liberal arts administration included queries on the use of merit salary raises for teaching, research, and public service. Nearly two-thirds of the institutions made merit salary awards for excellence in teaching, half rewarded research productivity in this way, and just over a third took public service into account in merit salary determinations. Both teaching and research are more likely to be recognized through merit salary adjustments in institutions that are large, public, and graduate. The effects of these characteristics are greater on research than teaching merit salary awards. For example, the use of merit salaries for teaching rises from 59 percent in the smallest institutions to 84 percent in the largest institutions, and the corresponding increase for research is from 36 percent to 80 percent. Community service follows the same pattern, except that it is as likely to be rewarded in undergraduate institutions as in universities.

Discussion

Our research leads us to conclude that discretionary funds for educational excellence, those which go beyond the provision of salaries and

essential operating expenses, are concentrated in less than a tenth of the colleges and universities in the United States. These are mainly large public universities and heavily endowed private institutions. Except for a small number of well endowed liberal arts colleges, the best funded colleges and universities are intensely research-oriented. Yet because of their largess of resources, these research-oriented institutions can also support teaching and teachers with educational materials and travel funds. They probably provide teaching-oriented faculty with everything they need except high professional status and salaries comparable to those for researchers. Liberal arts teachers in research-oriented institutions may find themselves in the strange position of receiving excellent support to develop their teaching skills and subject matter competencies while simultaneously receiving little recognition for their teaching achievements in department evaluations. A number of them doubtless would prefer to trade some of their resources for increased professional respect and appreciation of their performance as teachers.

There is more than a little evidence that liberal arts teaching is in less than excellent health. The concentration of discretionary resources for excellence in a small number of research-oriented institutions means that most college students are exposed to the liberal arts in settings characterized by relatively weak libraries, heavy faculty teaching and advising loads, and anemic support for faculty development and curriculum enrichment. Another symptom of inadequate funding is the substantial proportion of American colleges and universities in which at least a quarter of all liberal arts courses are taught by part-time instructors who rarely have any responsibilities to their students outside of the classroom.

Although teaching is certainly the most important factor in the evaluation of faculty for promotion, tenure, and merit salary increases in all

but the most research-oriented institutions, the translation of philosophical importance into concrete decision-making contingencies is not easy. The translation is from ideal norms to real norms; from values and beliefs to actions. Evaluations for promotion, tenure, and merit salary increases are usually based on limited time and limited evidence (Bowker, 1980). Research and publishing may be much less important than teaching in faculty personnel decisions, but it is much more easily measured, discussed, and evaluated. Because of lack of agreement in many colleges and universities on exactly what constitutes excellence in teaching and how teaching should be evaluated, faculty performance dimensions such as research and publications often play a disproportionately important role in faculty personnel decisions. There is widespread agreement on what constitutes good research and good publishing, and also that the measurement of faculty excellence in these performance areas is both reliable and valid.

A final point is occasioned by the surprisingly high degree of inconsistency noted between the importance of research in tenure decisions and the level of internal funding for research by untenured professors. This finding is typical of the inconsistencies among resources, standards, and rewards that were discovered throughout the study of chief liberal arts academic officers. For example, the importance of publications in the chief liberal arts academic officer's evaluations of departments and programs was consistent with the weighting of publications in tenure decisions in 212 institutions but inconsistent in 94 institutions. Faculty in many institutions are receiving mixed messages about the priority various activities should be given in their professional lives.

Universities and colleges are complex, partially integrated institutions. Closely related decisions are not necessarily made by the same administrators

and faculty committees. Formal criteria may be lacking, or at least inconsistent. Power is so diffuse in most institutions of higher education that no single administrator or committee has the capability of bringing these various decision-making processes into conformity with a common set of standards. In fact, the doctrine of separation of powers is held so dearly on many campuses that any attempt to improve the situtation would be viewed by faculty as subversive of academic freedom and the traditions of college life. Despite the strength of the opposition and the difficulty of the task, it is worth the effort for liberal arts administrators to work toward a very high degree of consistency among standards, rewards, and resource allocation patterns in American colleges and universities.

SUMMARY

Using data from a random sample of chief liberal arts academic officers in American colleges and universities, the authors have examined the support of teaching in the liberal arts (defined as the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities). Information was presented on 15 categories of faculty support for teaching and research, basic teaching conditions, tenure decisions, and merit salary increases. Differences in support were examined among institutions that vary in size, location, sponsorship, and degree level. We interpret these findings as suggesting that liberal arts teaching is in less than excellent health on most campuses. In addition, we have noted numerous inconsistencies among resources, standards, and rewards in institutions of higher learning and urge liberal arts administrators to reduce these inconsistencies where possible.

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Table 1

Availability of Institutional Funds for
Selected Educational Activities and Purchases

Activity or Purchase	Funds[a] Poor	Fair	Good	Excellent	N[b]
Travel to conferences	14.1%	43.4%	32.0%	10.6%	369
Travel to develop grants	45.5%	30.4%	20.5%	3.7%	352
Research by senior professors	34.6%	37.2%	23.2%	5.0%	341
Research by untenured professors	34.7%	36.4%	24.9%	4.0%	346
Purchase of computers	9.3%	30.3%	44.4%	16.0%	356
Purchase of research equipment	29.8%	39.8%	25.2%	5.2%	349
Purchase of library books	7.0%	25.7%	51.2%	16.0%	369
Purchase of library journals	8.7%	29.7%	49.0%	12.6%	357
Personnel for grant development	33.5%	38.9%	24.0%	3.6%	334
Offering graduate courses often	11.0%	23.7%	51.6%	13.7%	219
Graduate assistants - research	42.2%	37.3%	17.3%	3.2%	185
Graduate assistants - teaching	25.5%	31.4%	31.4%	11.7%	239
Sabbaticals for knowledge	19.6%	21.3%	35.2%	23.9%	352
Sabbaticals for research	24.6%	19.0%	31.0%	25.4%	232
Full professors' salaries[c]	36.7%	37.0%	18.5%	7.9%	368

[a]Row percentages do not always sum 100.0 due to standard rounding procedures.

[b]N's for some items are substantially lower because they apply mainly or excusively to graduate institutions.

[c]On the question about full professor's salaries, "average" was used instead of "fair" and "very good" was used instead of "excellent".

Table 2

Intercorrelation Matrix of Institutional Funding to Support Teaching and Research[a]

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Travel to conferences	x														
2. Travel to develop grants	.42***	x													
3. Research by senior profs.	.33***	.42***	x												
4. Research by untenured profs.	.28***	.38***	.72***	x											
5. Purchase of computers	.16***	.19***	.32***	.27***	x										
6. Purchase of research equip.	.32***	.34***	.42***	.43***	.39***	x									
7. Purchase of library books	.28***	.18***	.19***	.16***	.14**	.24***	x								
8. Purchase of library journals	.22***	.16***	.20***	.14**	.13**	.21***	.72***	x							
9. Personnel for grant development	.22***	.33***	.27***	.26***	.24***	.29***	.11*	.10*	x						
10. Offering graduate courses often enough	.02	.15***	.11*	.10	.05	.08	.03	.17**	.11*	x					
11. Research graduate assistantships	.08	.27***	.27***	.32***	.05	.22***	-.01	.00	.27***	.34***	x				
12. Teaching graduate assistantships	.22***	.24***	.27***	.30***	.15**	.30***	.15**	.12*	.22***	.28***	.48***	x			
13. Sabbaticals to improve knowledge	.22***	.17***	.29***	.29***	.13**	.22***	.15***	.18***	.13**	.10*	.15**	.16***	x		
14. Sabbaticals to do research	.29***	.20***	.32***	.38***	.19***	.29***	.16**	.18***	.18***	.08	.21**	.21**	.86***	x	
15. Salary for full professors	.32***	.30***	.33***	.35***	.17***	.34***	.16***	.17***	.17***	.11*	.22***	.21***	.18***	.19***	x

[a] All correlations are tau b.

* Statistically significant at less than .05.

** Statistically significant at less than .01.

*** Statistically significant at less than .001.

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Table 3

Relative Weights of Factors in Tenure Decisions

Factor	Weight						Total[a]
	1 (Highest)	2	3	4	5	6 (Lowest)	
Teaching	91.5%	5.2%	2.9%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	99.9%
Research	7.9%	34.2%	24.7%	11.7%	12.7%	8.9%	100.0%
Publication	8.7%	26.8%	22.6%	17.1%	12.6%	12.3%	100.0%
Institutional Service	0.6%	47.7%	23.1%	19.5%	6.4%	2.7%	100.0%
Prof. organizations	4.9%	21.7%	28.0%	27.6%	17.4%	0.3%	99.9%
Community service	0.3%	6.1%	27.5%	16.3%	22.0%	27.8%	100.0%

[a] Row percentages may not sum 100.0 due to standard rounding procedures.